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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 003928

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SUBJECT: GENERAL MYERS MEETS WITH MOD AND HIGH COMMAND

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons
1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (U) April 10, 2005, Ambassador's residence, Bogota.

2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

Ambassador William B. Wood
Gen Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
(CJCS)
Mr. Milton K. Drucker (DCM)
COL William G. Graves (Defense Attach)
COL Simeon Trombitas (Military Assistance Group Commander)
COL Rodney Anderson (CJCS Executive Assistant)
Mr. Paul Hanley (CJCS Communications Director)
Mr. Roger Carignan (NAS)
Mr. Craig Osth (ORA)
Mr. Jeffrey DeLaurentis (POL)
COL Rudesheim (CJCS J-5)

Colombia

Minister of Defense (MOD) Jorge Alberto Uribe Echevarria
GEN Carlos Ospina Ovalle (Armed Forces Commander)
GEN Freddy Padilla de Len (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of
Staff)
GEN Edgar Alfonso Lesmez Abad (Air Force Commander)
ADM Mauricio Alfonso Soto Gomez (Navy Commander)
MG Reinaldo Castellanos Trujillo (Army Commander)
MG Jorge Daniel Castro Castro (National Police Director)
MG Fernando Soler Torres (Joint Staff Operations Chief)
VMOD Andres Mauricio Penate Giraldo
Presidential Chief-of-Staff Juan Lozano

Summary

3. (C) Summary: On April 10, 2005, General Myers, MOD
Uribe, and senior Colombian military and government officers
discussed security achievements and the importance of
continued U.S. support. The Colombians noted that almost
every category of first quarter security results were better
than the previous year and that the GOC would be able to
negotiate with the illegal armed groups from a position of
power. The MOD and the service chiefs emphasized their
commitment to operating more jointly but noted that the
transformation has been slow and difficult. They praised
President Uribe for supporting the military, pressing for
change, and selecting new, innovative leaders. The MOD said
that lower level terrorists were being captured frequently
and that they and deserters were providing valuable
intelligence. In closing, the MOD and his colleagues
emphasized the importance of continued U.S. support. End
summary.

Colombian Achievements

4. (C) The Ambassador asked what the experience of the
Colombians in the first three months of 2005 had been and
what they expected for the next three months. The MOD
credited Uribe's security policy with improved quality of
life, more confidence in the government (higher approval
ratings than the Church), erosion of support for terrorists,
and illegal armed groups being forced to move to increasingly
remote areas. Although there had been some setbacks, he
noted that the trend was positive and that there was
improvement from 2004 in almost every category of first
quarter security results. Only attacks on the power
infrastructure and oil pipelines had increased. He said the
GOC expected the positive trend to continue but emphasized
the GOC must "stay the course" and not get impatient. CJCS
agreed maintaining momentum and keeping public opinion aware
of achievements was key.

Negotiated End

15. (C) The Ambassador noted that opinion polls indicate strong support for a negotiated settlement with illegal armed groups and praised the GOC for being able to negotiate from a position of strength. Lozano said four to six years ago the public was in favor of a negotiated peace accord, but the government was dealing from a position of weakness, which made negotiations unviable. VMOD Penate added that the public also used to fear that a stronger military and police force would prevent peace, but instead the security forces' increased capacity had made peace talks more possible.

Focus on Reform

16. (C) Admiral Soto emphasized the military's focus on new joint commands in the Plan Patriota area of operations and the Caribbean. Soto acknowledged that the military still had a long way to go, especially in sharing intelligence. General Lesmez stated that military culture, especially in the Air Force, was changing, and that the Air Force was working closely with other services and police. The Ambassador noted that military spending favors the Army (36 percent) and police (34 percent) and asked General Castellanos how this would change in a more joint environment. Castellanos defended the large Army budget, emphasizing that the Army was responsible for vast swaths of territory. He acknowledged that President Uribe had directed the security forces to operate jointly, but that the military had to be careful to create joint commands where they were viable in order to get positive results.

17. (C) CJCS said that during his visit in 2001, he visited each of the services and observed military training and noted that with a little assistance the Colombian military could serve anywhere in the world. Ospina praised Uribe for having provided a clear objective for the military. The MOD credited President Uribe's support for the military, new leadership selections, and pressure to perform as the impetus for many changes. For example, the MOD said that within a year and a half the military would have an entirely new and updated logistics system that will be the best on the continent. CJCS noted that change, even from the top, is very difficult, and that finding leadership willing to implement is even more difficult.

High Value Targets

18. (C) The MOD reported that security forces had been capturing numerous lower level commanders of the illegal armed groups, which, although not as important as capturing a senior commander, had weakened the enemy. Penate predicted a senior commander would be captured in the next three months. CJCS warned that U.S. experience had demonstrated the difficulty of capturing of HVTs. The MOD also noted that the GOC's reinsertion program for deserters had led to an influx of deserters, who were providing vast amounts of actionable intelligence, including on HVTs' locations and habits.

U.S. Support

19. (C) In closing, the MOD emphasized that U.S. assistance was crucial both financially and politically. He expressed concern that U.S. was increasingly shifting focus to the Middle East and away from Colombia's still unsolved problems. Lozano echoed this concern, warning that Colombia's illegal armed groups were threats to the hemisphere with world-wide links and a clear capacity to expand beyond Colombia's borders. The Ambassador agreed and noted that international terrorist groups could easily take advantage of Colombia's tenuous security situation and expertise of the illegal armed groups. In a separate breakfast meeting with General Myers, the MOD said Colombia needs included logistical and intelligence assistance and funding to update the Air Force's OV-10s, A-37s, and KFIRs. He expressed concern that President Chavez had control over oil revenue and the press, restricted civil liberties, and was buying up arms. He noted that Colombia would maintain an internal focus and count on U.S. support against Chavez. He said the upcoming bi-lateral working group (U.S./Colombia) was of great importance. Penate said he hoped General Myers would take two messages back to the U.S.: (1) HVTs are important to the success in Colombia and (2) Colombia needs financial and political support from the U.S.